

UPPER BURDEKIN 'ABCD' LAND CONDITION FRAMEWORK

A CONDITION (GOOD)

HAS THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:

- Good coverage of 3P grasses for that land type with less than 30% bare ground.
- No significant weed infestations.
- No erosion and good soil surface condition.
- No early signs of woodland thickening.
- 100% of original carrying capacity for that land type.



B CONDITION (FAIR)

HAS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Some decline in 3P grasses, an increase in less-favoured grasses and weeds, and/or bare ground greater than 25% but less than 50%.
- Some decline in soil condition, and some signs of previous and/or current susceptibility to erosion.
- Some thickening in density of woody plants.
- 80% of original carrying capacity.



C CONDITION (POOR)

HAS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- General decline of 3P grasses, large amounts of less-favoured species and/or bare ground greater than 50% but less than 80%.
- Obvious signs of past erosion and/or susceptibility currently high.
- General thickening in density of woody plants.
- 55% of original carrying capacity.



D CONDITION (VERY POOR)

HAS ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING:

- General lack of any perennial grasses or forbs.
- Severe erosion or scalding, resulting in a hostile environment for plant growth.
- Thickets of woody plants cover most of the area.
- 20% of original carrying capacity.



KEY MESSAGES

SAVING FOR A RAINY DAY

- Manage hillslope runoff to reduce gully and stream erosion.
- Reduce the number of large bare areas, particularly on hillslopes and near creek lines.
- Maintain ground cover levels at above 60% at the end of the dry season to increase rainfall infiltration, especially from the first rainfall events of the wet season.
- Small improvements in land condition will provide large benefits for pasture production and will reduce sediment and nutrient loss to streams and rivers.
- Remember, management actions take time to have effect; what you do now may take years to affect water quality, but much less time to benefit your production.

THE PATCHY PATH TO RECOVERY

- Improved grazing management can recover Indian couch-dominated land from C to B condition, but recovery is often a slow and patchy process.
- Average paddock condition doesn't mean even paddock condition; aim to optimise recovery in the most vulnerable C condition areas, rather than manage for average paddock condition.
- Recovering paddocks are less tolerant of renewed grazing pressure, especially in the early years of recovery. Allow time for plants to rebuild resources before re-stocking to long-term carrying capacity.
- Observing patchiness in your paddocks will help you manage for recovery:
 - Look out for the tell-tale signs of degradation and recovery at the patch scale, especially in vulnerable land types.
 - Monitor patch condition trends (for example, number and size of bare patches or recovering patches) for best results.

WET SEASON SPELLING

- Wet season spelling and seasonal adjustment of stocking rates facilitates the recovery of C condition land dominated by Indian couch.
- Poor condition paddocks require a minimum rest period of four to six months from the break of rain, or until pasture growth has ceased, to ensure long-term recovery.
- C condition, low-yielding pastures require longer rest periods and lower utilisation rates (conservative grazing pressure) to allow 3P grasses and soil condition to recover.
- The frequency of wet season spelling is determined by land condition and may have to be increased in poor condition paddocks to allow sustained recovery to take place.
- Spelling should be targeted at paddocks or paddock divisions that need a rest, i.e. spell those areas that show signs of degradation (for example, number and size of bare patches and recovering patches) and monitor the land condition trend.
- End-of-dry-season pasture yield and cover thresholds are critical for recovery. Aim to retain at least 60% ground cover and 800 kg of standing pasture at the end of each dry season for Indian couch pastures (and even more for tussock grass pastures).

FURTHER INFORMATION & CONTACTS:

The Ecograzing Project – developing guidelines to better manage grazing country. 2002. ISBN 0-9579842-0-0 (available from CSIRO or DPI&F)

Keeping it in Place – Controlling sediment loss on grazing properties in the Burdekin River catchment. 2004. ISBN 174036 5615 (available from CSIRO or DPI&F)

Meat and Livestock Australia EDGENetwork Grazing Land Management Workshops (contact DPI&F)



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